

MARTIN ILLERT, *Presbyter Kozma, Gegen die Bogomilen: Orthodoxie und Häresie auf dem mittelalterlichen Balkan* (Byzantioç: Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 18). Turnhout: Brepols 2021. 155 pp. – ISBN 978-2-503-59625-9

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Presbyter Kozma's *Beseda* is one of the most important works on medieval Bulgarian homiletics. It is almost the only first-hand witness to the Bogomil heresy in tenth-century Bulgaria. The book under review offers the first complete German translation based on BEGUNOV's text (1973) and thereby updates the French version of PUECH and VAILLANT (1945), which was done from POPRUŽENKO's edition (1907).¹ ILLERT provides new directions for research on both the *Beseda* and Bogomilism. Translating the sermon in full was certainly worthwhile. Earlier fragmentary translations focused mainly on Part I, the anti-heretical refutation, while neglecting Parts II (praise of monastic virtue) and III (duties of believers). However, the structure of the *Beseda* makes it clear that all three parts must be read together to appreciate the dialectical contrasts between heretical and orthodox asceticism and the proper balance between spiritual and secular life. Thus far, partial translations from SHARENKOFF to HAMILTON and STOYANOV have tended to remain narrowly within the history of Bogomilism in Bulgaria.² Although philological studies by DAVIDOV and scholars such as SAMPIMON and VAN HALSEMA have opened new avenues, the text is still mostly treated as a source for Bogomil studies.³

1. YURII K. BEGUNOV (ed.), *Козма Презвитер в славянских литературах*. Sofia 1973; HENRI-CHARLES PUECH – ANDRÉ VAILLANT (tr.), *Le traité contre les Bogomiles de Cosmas le prêtre* (Institut d'Etudes Slaves, Travaux 21). Paris 1945; МИХАИЛ ПОПРУЖЕНКО (ed.), *Козмы Пресвитера слово на еретики*. St. Petersburg 1907.

2. VICTOR SHARENKOFF, *A Study of Manichaeism in Bulgaria: With Special Reference to the Bogomils*. New York 1927; JANET HAMILTON – BERNARD HAMILTON – YURI STOYANOV, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450* (Manchester Medieval Sources Series). Manchester 1998.

3. ANGEL DAVIDOV, *Речник-индекс на Презвитер Козма*. Sofia 1976; IDEM, *Indices to the Homily Against the Bogomils by Cosmas the Priest*. *Polata knigopisnaja* 31–32 (1999) pp. 3–18; JANETTE SAMPIMON – SARA VAN HALSEMA, *Cosmas Presbyter, Homily against the Bogomils: Operational Edition*. *Polata knigopisnaja* 34 (2005) pp. 1–133.

ILLERT's approach is carefully articulated: 'In the spirit of Eastern Church hermeneutics, our study does not aim at an objective reconstruction of "Bogomilism" and "Orthodoxy", but rather reads the *Beseda* as a self-description by the Eastern Church, expressing its own worldview and piety' (p. 15: my translation). In this context, ILLERT re-examines the historiography of Bogomil studies and reinterprets the *Beseda* as a work of Slavic literature. His introduction surveys the editorial and translational history of the work, explores its connections with contemporary sacred writings, and provides a review of scholarship on Bogomilism. It also analyzes Kozma's rhetoric and structure, compares its style and content with Byzantine sources – especially with Zigabenos – and highlights Kozma's pneumatology.

ILLERT does not strongly oppose previous historical interpretations but accepts the conventional dating of the *Beseda* to around 972 CE. He rightly remains skeptical of DANDO's proposal to date the text two centuries later (p. 25).⁴ Moreover, he notes an important caveat: it remains unclear which 'new Presbyter John' is referenced – John the Exarch, John of Rila, John of Debar, or Patriarch John X – and each identification would shift the chronology. However, when approached not as a historical record but as homiletic literature, the *Beseda* undergoes an initial creation and later a 'second birth' through renewed attention and citation. It appears that between the Council of Tărnovo (1211) and the fourteenth century, Kozma's sermon circulated in various regions. It may therefore be more appropriate to view the text within the framework of reception history rather than purely as an initial reaction to Bogomilism.

In his translation, ILLERT identifies rhetorical devices – imperatives, questions, *paronomasia*, *erotapokriseis*, dialogic forms, and comparisons – and shows that the *Beseda* belongs to the tradition of patristic literature (pp. 28–33). Kozma mastered the style typical of anti-heretical treatises, aligning new deviants with figures such as Arius, Macedonius, and Sabellius. Yet, as ILLERT argues, the *Beseda* should be classified among Slavic homiletic writings featuring 'appearances of heretics' rather than among formal Greek heresiological works such as treatises, catalogues, or *panoplies*. Byzantine heresiology, which understands a 'heretic' chiefly as a partisan collective, does not make use of the abstract notion of 'heresy' introduced by the pseudo-prophets depicted in 2 Peter 2:1. As ILLERT observes,

4. MARCEL DANDO, *Peut-on avancer de 240 ans la date de composition du traité de Cosmas le Prêtre contre les Bogomiles ? Cahiers d'études cathares II.100* (1983) pp. 3–25.

Kozma's deliberate emphasis on the word 'heretic' when citing that verse shows that he preaches without adopting a taxonomic heresiological standpoint (p. 92).

The *Beseda* denounces the Bogomils by name and presents their doctrines, but not to systematically define them as a cult. Instead, Kozma frames contemporary Bulgarian religious problems through 'heresy-issues', echoing earlier heresiological traditions. ILLERT situates Kozma's tenth-century *Beseda* as evidence of an early, specifically Bulgarian phase of Bogomil teaching, whereas the elaborate theological system set out two centuries later by the Constantinopolitan theologian Euthymios Zigabenos marks a distinct, subsequent development. Earlier scholarship, however, tended to read the two works as consecutive stages in a single, internally driven evolution of doctrine. However, as YURI STOYANOV has critically shown, the 'contact hypothesis (*Kontakthypothese*)' linking Bogomils to Paulicians, Massalians, and Cathars is no longer tenable (p. 51). The 'priest Bogomil' depicted by Kozma appears simply as a local preacher, not the ancestor of later heresies. ILLERT's decision to read the *Beseda* as homiletic literature, not a proto-Bogomil chronicle, rightly warns against directly comparing Kozma's account with the Bogomils of Zigabenos' time.

The 'Bogomil' label reflects varying local categorizations rather than a single movement. Thus, the focus should shift from the history of heretics to the history of heresiology. Notably, neither Euthymios Zigabenos nor Anna Komnena shows awareness of Kozma's *Beseda*. Their silence invites reflection on the textual milieu of the time. Scholars who have constructed a seamless narrative from the Bogomils to the Cathars must now reconsider their assumptions. ILLERT's study opens an urgently needed breach in a field long confined by obsolete, politically, or regionally motivated models (pp. 44–54).

A major contribution of ILLERT's study is his emphasis on Kozma's pneumatology, which serves as a key not only for understanding the *Beseda* but also for reassessing the entire Bogomil question. From the outset, Kozma had no intention of addressing his polemical sermon to the heretics themselves. As ILLERT explains, the *Beseda* follows a liturgical-catechetical structure, moving through renunciation of evil, illumination by the Spirit, and exhortation to new life. However, Kozma does not apply this threefold initiation scheme to the heretics as one might expect in a sermon against heretics. Instead, his words are consistently directed at the Orthodox faithful, urging them toward repentance and renewal through the Holy Spirit.

This focus gives the *Beseda* a unified character that earlier readers have often overlooked (pp. 20–21).

For Kozma, ILLERT argues, it was essential to emphasize, especially in the second and third parts of the *Beseda*, the ideal of a life led by the Holy Spirit as the main theme of his sermon. The teachings of the Bogomils discussed in the first part serve as an antithesis inspired by evil spirits. This argument is supported by the analysis of rhetorical types (pp. 28–33) and his study of liturgical quotations (pp. 33–44), where, in addition to the catechetical-liturgical basic structure of the work, Kozma cites liturgical texts. Kozma does not counter the Bogomils' criticisms of the Church by quoting biblical texts as was common in anti-heretical polemic. Instead, he upholds Orthodox devotional practices, particularly through the veneration of icons (pp. 43–44). In the central section of the *Beseda*, the pneumatological theme intensifies, beginning with a petition to the Spirit and moving to the Jesus Prayer. The sermon culminates in its pneumatological emphasis, marking Kozma's original contribution to the reform of Eastern Christian spirituality in the late tenth century (pp. 55–56).

The medieval Church's hatred of heresy can be traced back to the warning in Mark 3:28–29 that 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' would not be forgiven. The stigma attached to the Bogomils – articulated both by Kozma and, in a similar vein, by Alexios I through the measures recorded in Alexias XV.8 onward – centered on their alleged rejection of spiritual fathers, Scripture, the Cross, and the Eucharist. Their monastic garb masked false virtue, and their demiurgic cosmology drew on older myths to deny the works of the Spirit.

As a result of this volume, several renditions of the *Beseda* now exist in English, French, and German. The project led by SAMPIMON and VAN HALSEMA may well bring forth new translations into additional languages. It seems that Kozma is finally reaching a period of broader international recognition – Japan being no exception.⁵ ILLERT's latest study should pro-

5. The Japanese Slavist TERASHIMA KENJI translated DIMITAR ANGELOV, Боротството в България. Sofia 1969, into Japanese, providing Japanese readers with one of the first gateways to Bogomilism and to medieval Bulgarian literature and intellectual history: *Itan no shūha Bogomīru* [The Bogomil Heretical Sect]. Tokyo 1989. TERASHIMA, fully aware of BEGUNOV's 1973 edition, also published a short essay on the *Beseda* and the Letter of Theophylaktos: *Sur le dualisme hérétique dans « Le traité contre les Bogomiles » de Cosmas le prêtre : I. « Theophylacti Constantinopolis Patriarchae Epistola Petro Bulgarorum Regi »*. *Études de littératures européennes* (Université Waseda Faculté des Lettres) 30 (1982) pp. 93–103 (in Japanese). A complete Japanese translation of the

vide valuable support for reviving and realizing that undertaking.

That said, for international readers, the present German translation would have been even more valuable had it included systematic tables comparing its readings with the earlier French or the English versions. Given that the lexicon cited exclusively for church vocabulary is ONASCH (1981) rather than the revised 1993 edition,⁶ a more comprehensive and up-to-date reference guide – incorporating modern-language dictionaries and Church-Slavonic lexica – would have greatly aided non-native readers, especially those who find etymological notes and lexical history particularly enlightening. These desiderata, however, do not diminish the book's overall achievement. By reopening fundamental questions concerning Kozma's *Beseda*, ILLERT has produced a study whose value remains indisputable.

Keywords

Bogomilism; medieval Bulgarian literature

Beseda, however, has yet to be produced.

6. KONRAD ONASCH, *Liturgie und Kunst der Ostkirche in Stichworten unter Berücksichtigung der Alten Kirche*. Leipzig 1981; IDEM, *Lexikon Liturgie und Kunst der Ostkirche unter Berücksichtigung der Alten Kirche*. Berlin 1993.